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FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4802
INFO RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS 0507
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC
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RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002521

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/W AND AF/EX
DEPT PASS TO USTR-AGAMA
TREASURY FOR PETERS AND HALL
DOC FOR 3317/ITA/OA/KBURRESS AND 3130/USFC/OIO/ ANESA/DHARRIS
USAID/AFR/WA FOR TWAY, USAID/AFR/SD JHILL, AND USAID/EGAT MOTT

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ECON](#) [ENRG](#) [EINV](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: Nigeria: NGO Democracy Roundtable: 40 NGOs give Mixed Views on GON Democracy in 2008

¶11. (U) Summary. On December 16, the Ambassador hosted a roundtable discussion called "Looking Back on Nigeria's Democracy in 2008" with stakeholders from 40 civil society organizations ranging from NGO groups on electoral reform, democratic principals, human rights, faith-based organizations, media representatives, and private sector development. The purpose of this roundtable was to hear the NGOs views of the challenges and successes of Nigeria's democratic process in 2008, and to discuss what the democracy frontier for Nigeria will look like in 2009, including the role NGOs can play. Discussions focused on democracy and governance, human rights, religious tolerance, press freedom, and private sector issues. There was a general consensus that the GON has not provided adequate governance or leadership, that there was a reverse of anti-corruption efforts and that without infrastructure development economic welfare and safety of Nigerian citizens will still be weak.

There was a sense that Nigeria needs some type of "non-violent popular revolution of ideas" to spark better leadership, a change in the cultural paradigm and move the country out of its political and economic doldrums. However, in response to the Ambassador's direct question on the potential for a military coup or intervention, given Nigerians' level of disappointment in the government, all the representatives said a resounding, "NO", highlighting that the country has moved past this phase in its history. Ambassador offered to hold a series of these NGO roundtable on going forward.

End Summary.

¶12. (U) NGO Report on GON Democracy

Efforts: The general consensus by the NGOs was that corruption is endemic through all levels of government and that there is a lack of good governance and accountability. The demotion and continued harassment of former EFCC Chairman Mallam Nuhu Ribadu was described as sending a message to committed public servants that they will not be rewarded for honesty and dedication. Fraud in vote counting was perceived as a key factor in the lack of citizen participation in the electoral process as their vote is seen as not affecting the outcome. Violence occurring during elections and the concurrent lack of security evoke fear and intimidation among the electorate when they attempt to participate. The upholding of the Yar'Adua presidency by the Supreme Court was seen by some as evidence of the lack of accountability in elections. Certain sectors of society (re: the elites) are believed to control the key elements of election process and power in Nigeria, leading to a frustrated and disenfranchised electorate. Remedies suggested were that the GON needs to fully implement the existing laws against corruption, enforce those laws and sensitize the Nigerian public to the cost

that corruption levies upon their country in investment, lost revenues and the misuse of funds. Participants also said the GON needs to provide security during elections and hold accountable those politicians who attempt to incite disturbances.

¶3. (U) Religious Tolerance/Diversity. Most of the participants believed that the religious tensions which have lead to conflict in Nigeria have been politically or tribally instigated. Christian and Muslim leaders at the forum agreed that the various religions coexist peacefully in Nigeria, suggesting that religious or tribal factors are only used to cause dissent when some political advantage can be reached. Participants suggested poverty, ignorance, poor leadership, and political manipulation of the electorate as key factors provoking religious intolerance. They suggested that the government enforce existing laws, add religious tolerance to educational curriculum, and continue to promote the idea of being Nigerian first and foremost, above tribe, region or religion.

¶4. (U) Human Rights. Participants identified numerous abuses in the present structure towards marginalized groups including, women, people living with HIV/AIDS, children, victims of human trafficking, and activists and journalists who attempt to report on controversial issues. The courts are generally seen as corrupt, with justice "depending on the amount of money you give to the court." GON actions in the Niger Delta were specifically mentioned during this segment, being reported as extremely punitive and brutal. Human rights activists expressed grave concern over the lack of documentation and reporting of human rights violations and cases, the police perception that trafficked women and children in the sex trade were criminals rather than victims, weak legislative oversight in monitoring and funding those agencies that attempt to monitor

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human rights, and a complete lack of political will to change the present atmosphere. On children in particular, there was grave concern that in all cases involving youth, they are not seen as victims but a key factor in the problems in conflict sensitive areas. Participants recommended that the GON develop a comprehensive plan of action for Nigeria, rather than relying on the states to develop their own policies, which rarely get implemented. They also said agencies responsible for implementation of a federal plan would need to be fully funded and protected against political pressure. One activist suggested that international aid be tied to human rights adherence. Many argued strongly for better training and accountability for the Nigerian police and security forces, seen as some of the most egregious violators of human rights.

¶5. (U) Media and Press Freedom. Participants reported that press freedom is diminishing in Nigeria, citing increased harassment of journalists and other media representatives as clear evidence. The media is seen to be resisting thus far, but there was great concern that as pressure mounts and frustration grows, more professionals will opt to leave the country when possible. Politicians are increasingly filing legal cases against media who report on allegations of corruption. These cases have not been resolved, but present a continuing threat against reporters and those media outlets who are trying to do investigative reporting. The police have blocked access for reporters in several areas, most recently during the disturbances in Jos, allowing entrance to only selected reporters.

¶6. (U) Private Sector and Democracy. Participants expressed concern over the lack of an open relationship between the private and public sectors. Representatives from several private sector firms said the GON had not provided favorable policies or the infrastructure needed to support private business in Nigeria. Poor roads, the lack of a railway system, high taxes and interest rates, and inadequate power and water supply were seen as critically damaging to private sector development and investment. It was noted that the existence of small scale industries dropped from eight million to two million in Nigeria from 2006 to 2008 due to stringent procedures, high interest charges and fees and documentation required from banks in order for these small businesses to obtain capital. Private sector representatives recommended that the GON provide adequate training for vocational programs to build the

capacity of small and medium enterprises in Nigeria. Another recommendation was that the Nigerian government put into regulation that all multi-national companies operating in crucial industries such as the oil sector of the Niger Delta must hire and provide job training for a regulated proportion of residents of the community or what is more commonly known as the local content issue.

17. (U) Comment: This forum ended with participants summarizing their conclusions that the GON has not provided adequate governance or leadership. There was reversal of anti-corruption efforts and that the main challenge to economic development was Nigeria's poor infrastructure. It was interesting to note that not one single NGO thought that military intervention was possible at this point in Nigeria's history. They saw their role as NGOs as trying to manage or in some cases encourage a popular peoples' non-violent "revolution" of ideas and cultural paradigm shift to move Nigeria forward. The Ambassador offered to use her good offices to host follow-on fora where these and other civil society organizations could come together to develop a unified strategy or road map for advocating change in Nigeria. Participants were very receptive to the idea of continued dialogue and further meetings of this type.

SANDERS